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THE DUTCH SCHOOL.

BY MRS. C. P. GRUPPE.

I will doubtless not incur the charge of speaking with prejudice, faulty judgment, or undue eulogy, if I say unqualifiedly that the modern Dutch school of painting is the simplest, strongest, sincerest and most vital school of art existing at the present day. It does not run riot in glaring color; it does not ransack the universe for novelties; it does not strain after the picturesque and striking; it does not cultivate chic or brilliancy; it does not venture upon license, either of subject or treatment; but it is wholesome, clean, pure; it is imbued with the poetry of common life and commonplace scenes; it is rich with glorious color harmonies that the men of to-day learned from their immortal ancestors; it is the true expression of life and nature.

In a word, the art of present day Holland, in its simplicity, its honesty and its directness is part and parcel of the people and the country, and any consideration of modern Dutch art in general or of the work of any one artist in particular would be singularly faulty did it not lay adequate stress upon the history and character of the people and upon their environment and their struggles. In the stirring incidents of the history of Holland, one finds displayed all the virtues that go to the making of a great nation—and the virtues that make a great nation will make a great art. Endurance, foresight, strength of will, patience, courage, the spirit no defeat can daunt, the love of learning, and, above all, the appreciation of simple beauty—these are traits of the Dutch as a nation, and they are all reflected in their national art.

The Hollanders were early educated into the practice of patience and determination, through a stern conflict with the sea. No generous soil, no unvarying sunshine, rendered life for them easy and luxurious. They had to win and they now are obliged to hold against the ocean the very earth on which they tread. They found swamps almost uninhabitable, and by their incessant toil they covered them with green pastures and thriving marts of trade. Literally they brought order out of chaos. Where once rolled a wild waste of water, or where once the pathway led through slimy morasses, snug homesteads arose through their industry and determined effort, sleek cattle browsed by the banks of trim canals and magnificent emporiums of commerce attracted the trade of the world. As Motley eloquently says of the Dutch, they found a region outcast of ocean and earth and wrested at last from both domains their richest treasures—an achievement of which they may well be proud.

The repellant waste of centuries ago is to-day one of the choicest garden spots of Europe. The transformation has meant toil, self-denial, suffering; in a word, the exercise of all that heroism, intelligence and industry which an inhospitable country tends to stimulate and develop, and a clime more favored of fortune tends to deaden. Had the Hollanders enjoyed Latin skies, had been lapped in luxury instead of being forced to struggle with nature, had their home enjoyed the advantages of Southern Europe, their art to-day would not have the sterling qualities that characterize it, but would likely savor of the decadence that marks the art of present Italy and Spain, and the banality of much of France's product which annually crowds the famous salons of Paris.

As a matter of fact, the art a nation produces, the art an individual man produces, is not one of those accidents of which we can neither distinguish the cause nor foresee the objects, it is the direct outcome of character and disposition, and is the reflection of the surroundings in which it develops itself. There is not a single exception to this rule. All art that has endured, all art that is worthy of the name, proves it, be it the

art of Raphael or the art of Rembrandt. The matchless creations of Rembrandt's genius claims for all time the reverent admiration of the world, and behind his wonderful canvases and his no less wonderful etchings one sees the national life of the Dutch.

His works—and the same is true of the present-day Dutch artists—are the result and the expression of the sorrows the people have borne, of the triumphs they have gained, of the industry that has become a national trait, of the simplicity and frugality that have been inculcated until they are literally ingrained.

Thus the art of Holland, from its first beginnings to its twentieth century triumphs, has been peculiarly characteristic of the place of its birth. No other country could have produced it. From the black hours of the war of independence, the land has passed into the light of freedom and peace. With the growth of wealth came the encouragement of art, and, as might naturally be expected, that art was a strong and manly art.

The painters at the outset sat down before nature and painted what they saw, and at the present day the artists follow exactly the same practice. As a consequence, their works have in unrivaled measure the impress of truth and reality. Rembrandt, the greatest of them all, studied with incessant assiduity the common people with whom he was brought in contact, and went to nature as a reverent seeker for truth. The men and women who are making the art of Holland to-day have never sought to improve on Rembrandt's methods—they, too, go to nature for their inspiration. And as Wordsworth says: "Nature never did betray the heart that loved her."

They are content with their own land, their own people, their own customs, habits, traits; they paint what they know and as they know it; and, naturally, they paint it vividly and grandly—an unsurpassed art.

The New Orleans *Times-Democrat* had recently the following somewhat exaggerated pasquil:

"Dirt is a great promoter of picture sales," remarked a dealer, rather cynically, the other morning. "For over a year I had a couple of small canvases on exhibition here in the store, and although they were really works of art, I couldn't get rid of them at any figure. They were studies in oil by a young French painter—one an ideal head and the other a landscape, and they were well worth my original price of \$100 apiece. There were no customers for them, however, and after a few months I cut that down to \$50, and then dropped a notch at a time until I finally ticketed them at \$8.49 for the pair. I put on the tag partly as a joke and partly because I was mad, but I must confess I was considerable surprised when nobody took up the proposition. Then I had a bright idea. I took the two pictures out of their handsome 'shadow boxes,' slapped them into a couple of shabby gilt frames, put back the first price and sent them over to a second-hand store in the Old Quarter. The place I am speaking of is beyond doubt the dirtiest den in town. It is cluttered up with broken furniture, smells like a morgue and hasn't been swept since the year 1; but, nevertheless, it is a great resort for Northern curio hunters. They imagine they make 'discoveries' there, and, sure enough, in less than a week one of them discovered my paintings and almost dislocated his arm in getting out his pocketbook before anybody could rush in ahead of him. My conscience is easy, for he got a bargain as it was, but the episode is discouraging. I'm thinking of discharging our scrub woman and emptying a few trash barrels around the store. Then, maybe, I'll be able to convince people that I have works of art on the premises."